



The array is expected to save the private school

ol expands ergy savings

With net-metered systems, any excess power that produced gets fed into the grid and racks up credit with the utility that would be used if and when the school needs to draw power from WAPA.

Now we actually have this excess capacity, which the school is hoping that we can apply to the lower campus," Vargo said.

A monitoring system will be installed by the end of the month to provide the school with real-time data collected by the monitoring system will help with further energy savings and will be used for analysis and problem-solving in the school's science and math classes, according to Vargo.

The project also is intended to be a learning opportunity for students," she said.

The third phase of the Giffit Hill energy initiative is to fit the air conditioning units at the upper campus.

Phase three has not started yet, but we're hoping it will be done by July," Vargo said.

The school estimates the entire cost of the project at \$53,000 and has received \$91,000 in gifts and grants so far, she said.

"It's really an easy sell to some new donors and existing donors," Vargo said. "For a project like this, it makes sense. We'll pay it off in less than five years, and it saves over \$1 million over the next 20 years."

The private Giffit Hill School is the only preschool through high school program on St. John, with about 100 students currently enrolled, Vargo said.

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Crucian senators, suits allege rum distilleries linked to 'black smut'

By JONATHAN AUSTIN
Daily News Staff

Two St. Croix senators are pushing for answers about the effect and impact of a soot-like fungus that darkens cars, structures, signs and vegetation around the two distilleries on St. Croix.

"The black mold has partially and in some cases completely covered the landscape, buildings, personal property and street signs," Sen. Kurt Vialet said. "While appearance and decrease in property value is a concern, it is even more important to understand and address the effects of rum fungus on vegetation," he wrote in a statement. "Communities are affected by fungus growing on fruit and vegetable trees and plants. Crops cannot be consumed or sold, resulting in a decrease in food supply and income."

Several St. Croix residents have filed suit against Diageo USVI, Inc. and Cruzan Viril, Ltd., owners of the two island distilleries, claiming that the rum fungus is a substantial annoyance that destroys surfaces, damages fruits, vegetables and plants and decreases the value of properties located around the distilleries.

The lawsuit is similar to suits filed in Kentucky and Scotland against Diageo companies.

In Kentucky, the Louisville Metro Air Pollution Control District issued violation against Diageo and threatened to levy \$10,000-a-day fines. Diageo agreed in July 2013 to clear out its inventory in one warehouse, local media reported.

In Scotland, residents living near a Chivas Brothers distillery say the mold is the scotch industry's "dirty little secret" that blights cars, homes and vegetation in the town of Beith.

Scots in the town of Bonnybridge have sued Diageo, retaining the same American lawyer who filed suit in Kentucky. The attorney, William McMurtry, also is listed as counsel on the St. Croix suit, with Vincent Colianni II of Christiansted and Morris & Player LLC, of Louisville, Ky.

The fungus, known as *baudoinia compniacensis*, was identified by James Scott, a Canadian scientist, whose research showed that exposure to ethanol will accelerate its growth.

Diageo USVI spokeswoman Erica Johnson said by email that the company is "committed to maintaining the highest level of environmental standards and supporting the communities in which we operate, and we are taking this matter very seriously. "While we are sympathetic to the concerns raised by some St. Croix residents, we believe that the blackening of some

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buildings and structures is due to naturally occurring mold found widely throughout the environment, including in areas unrelated to the production of rum," she said. "We do not believe that our operations have caused any harm to property or pose any threat to health. We are cooperating fully with the DPNR on this issue."

The Daily News was told that a spokesperson for Cruzan Viril, Ltd. on St. Croix would not be available for several days.

Vialet said he has contacted the Department of Planning and Natural Resources to "express his concern" regarding rum fungus, and he said he was told "that they were looking into the matter." He said the commissioner "has been in contact with both of the companies" but that both were hesitant to discuss the issue because of the pending lawsuit.

"We have offered both of these companies very good economic benefits for them to be able to operate," Vialet said. "We are even subsidizing the cost of molasses" used in the distillation of rum. "As a corporate citizen, I think they should have a bit more responsibility" and make the effort to install technology that will keep the mold spores from spreading outside the distillery.

Sen. Kenneth Gittens later issued a statement asking Vialet, who is chairman of the committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services, to schedule a committee meeting to "discuss and investigate the potential major health risk to the residents of St. Croix, specifically on the western side of the island."

"This black smut that we are seeing is similar to what residents have seen in parts of Kentucky," Gittens wrote.

Referring to the violations levied in Louisville, he said it may be more than a coincidence that London-based Diageo faced fines after their bourbon barrel storage warehouses were blamed for emitting ethanol vapors that promote the growth and appearance of a black fungus.

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